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Social development: literacy for life: shaping future agendas

Literacy for life: shaping future agendas and education for democracy

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General hereby transmits the report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on literacy for life: shaping future agendas, submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 69/141, and on education for democracy, in accordance with Assembly resolution 69/268.

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Report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization on literacy for life: shaping future agendas and on education for democracy

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 69/141, in which the Assembly requested the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to continue its coordinating and catalytic role in advancing literacy across the world, including in the context of the agenda for the period following the United Nations Literacy Decade, by developing Member States' capacities in the areas of policies, programme delivery and literacy assessments; scaling up literacy action for girls and women; reinforcing innovative models of literacy delivery through information and communications technology and other means; and expanding the knowledge base and monitoring and evaluation, as well as advocating literacy on the global agenda and ensuring synergies between different actions, through multi-stakeholder partnerships and networks and other means. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the Director-General of UNESCO, to submit to the Assembly at its seventy-first session a report on the implementation of the resolution.

The world community recognized literacy as an "indispensable foundation for independent learning" in Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all and subsequently in General Assembly resolution 70/1, entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". One goal of the world community is universal literacy. Target 4.6 of the Sustainable Development Goals reflects the ambitious and transformative agenda for literacy action in the next 15 years. UNESCO continues to play a catalytic and coordinating role by supporting Member States in their efforts to create a more literate world, as well as ensuring synergies between different actions, in particular through the establishment of the Global Alliance for Literacy within the framework of lifelong learning.

The last section of the report includes information on activities carried out to promote education for democracy, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 69/268.

I. Introduction

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 69/141, expressed its conviction that "literacy is crucial to the acquisition by every child, young person and adult of the essential life skills that will enable them to address the challenges that they may face in life and represents an essential condition of lifelong learning, which is an indispensable means for effective participation in knowledge societies and economies of the twenty-first century". Literacy empowers individuals and forms an integral part of transformative learning for realizing more inclusive, just and sustainable societies.

2. Despite steady progress made over the past years, the General Assembly noted with deep concern the scale of literacy challenges that lie ahead. Today, there are still at least 757 million adults who lack basic literacy skills, of whom one third are women.[1] In 2013, an estimated 124 million children and adolescents worldwide were out of school.[2] Of the world's 650 million primary-school-age children, at least 250 million children, many of whom are from disadvantaged backgrounds, are not acquiring basic skills in reading and mathematics.[3] These challenges are distributed in an inequitable manner across countries and populations. For instance, more than half of all illiterate adults reside in South and West Asia (51 per cent), while 25 per cent of them live in sub-Saharan Africa, 12 per cent in East Asia and the Pacific, 7 per cent in the Arab States and 4 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean. The gender gap in education persists, and the literacy rate among adults with disabilities is as low as 3 per cent in some countries.

3. The General Assembly recognized the importance of national efforts and encouraged Member States and their partners, including specialized agencies and other relevant organizations of the United Nations system, donors, civil society and the private sector, to sustain and expand the gains achieved during the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012) by improving the integration of literacy into sector-wide and multisectoral education and development strategies, expanding the provision of quality literacy programmes, enhancing education systems to provide quality basic education through schooling, enriching literate environments to allow people to acquire, use and advance literacy skills and promoting literacy for women and girls, as well as for marginalized groups, for their empowerment and inclusion in societies. The Assembly also called upon all governments to build a robust knowledge and technical base through improved literacy monitoring, assessment and research, including the development of reliable measures of literacy, and to generate data that are comparable across time and disaggregated by age, sex, disability, socioeconomic status, geographical location (urban/rural areas) and other relevant factors.

4. In the same resolution, the General Assembly requested UNESCO to continue its coordinating and catalytic role in advancing the literacy agenda in the current global context, within which the recently adopted Sustainable Development Goals

[1] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Institute for Statistics, Fact Sheet No. 32, "Adult and youth literacy", September 2015. Available from www.uis.unesco.org/FactSheets/Pages/Literacy.aspx.

[2] Ibid., Fact Sheet No. 31, "A growing number of children and adolescents are out of school as aid fails to meet the mark", July 2015. Available from www.uis.unesco.org/Library/Documents/fs31-out-of-school-children-and-adolescents-en.pdf.

[3] UNESCO, *Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges* (Paris, 2015).

are being pursued, by developing Member States' capacities in the five strategic axes of action for the period following the United Nations Literacy Decade, as identified in the Director-General's report on literacy for life: shaping future agendas (A/69/183) and endorsed by the Assembly.

5. The last section of the report includes information on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 69/268 on education for democracy, in which it called for an intensification of efforts to promote education for democracy and requested the Secretary-General, in cooperation with UNESCO, to report to the Assembly at its seventy-first session on the implementation of the resolution.

II. Advancing the global literacy agenda

6. The present report describes the coordinating and catalytic actions carried out by UNESCO since the sixty-ninth session of the General Assembly in the following five strategic axes of action for advancing the global literacy agenda:

(a) Developing the capacities of Member States in the areas of policies, programme delivery and literacy assessments;

(b) Scaling up literacy actions for girls and women;

(c) Reinforcing innovative modes of literacy delivery, including the use of information and communication technologies;

(d) Expanding the knowledge base and monitoring and evaluation;

(e) Advocating for literacy on the global agenda and ensuring synergies between different actions, including through a multi-stakeholder partnership and networks.

7. The present report is presented against the backdrop of the vision statement contained in General Assembly resolution 70/1, entitled "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", in which a world with universal literacy is envisaged as a part of the transformative and ambitious global agenda. While literacy is a driver for sustainable development, advancement in other areas of sustainable development creates an environment conducive to the acquisition, use and advancement of people's literacy skills. The Sustainable Development Goals therefore call for enhancing intersectoral cooperation to create synergies between literacy and other areas of development. Literacy is integral to all targets of Goal 4 on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, and youth and adult literacy is specifically addressed by target 4.6 and to a certain extent by target 4.4. The 2030 Agenda also reaffirms the need for a holistic approach to literacy — a continuum of proficiency levels — which is developed through formal, non-formal and informal learning throughout life in various social, cultural, political, economic and historical contexts. Moreover, the Goals recognize the universality of the literacy agenda.

8. Now is a defining moment in time, as the world embarks on a great collective journey to build a better future for all people in the next 15 years. It provides a renewed opportunity for the international community to act collaboratively to advance the global literacy agenda and strengthen the key foundation of that better future, especially for the millions who have not been able to achieve their full human potential.

9. The present report presents not only a snapshot of the literacy actions that UNESCO has been able to coordinate and catalyse, but also touches upon a new initiative that could potentially bring greater coherence in future actions, namely the Global Alliance for Literacy within the framework of lifelong learning. It was created in response to the General Assembly's request that UNESCO establish a multi-stakeholder partnership to ensure synergies between different actions.

A. Developing Member States' capacities in the area of policies, programme delivery and literacy assessments

10. UNESCO has been supporting some 40 countries in their efforts to enhance inclusive and gender-responsive policies and programmes and to build institutional and individual capacities in literacy. It has continued to support countries in developing literacy policies and implementing gender-responsive, contextually relevant literacy programmes.

11. The use of the principles of participatory and collaborative action research is an effective approach for developing high-quality, inclusive and innovative literacy education policies and programmes in multilingual and multicultural contexts. In 2015, UNESCO published a guidebook on this theme, which will be used for teacher training in bilingual education in at least 11 West African countries. It is also working with countries in francophone Africa to develop a harmonized curriculum for bilingual education and has already supported Senegal in developing a model for bilingual formal and non-formal basic education.

12. In South Sudan, UNESCO has been supporting the development of strategic plans for the implementation of national literacy policy; the establishment of 13 literacy centres in three states, Eastern Equatoria, Central Equatoria and Northern Bahr el Ghazal; and the training of literacy teachers.

13. Despite significant advances in expanding primary and secondary education, the Latin American and Caribbean region has 36 million young people and adults who have insufficient proficiency in literacy and basic skills (9 per cent of the population), of whom more than half are women. Of the total population with literacy challenges, 2.5 million are enrolled in literacy programmes (of whom more than 65 per cent are women), covering only 8 per cent of the potential demand. However, as a reflection of strong political will, various countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region made efforts to put appropriate literacy policies in place, link policies with broader national education and development policies and launch or strengthen national literacy campaigns. The following examples illustrate the commitment of the countries that have prioritized literacy in their national development efforts.

14. In Mexico, UNESCO, in partnership with the National Institute for Adult Education, has implemented a national campaign for literacy and for closing educational gaps, serving 7.5 million people over the age of 15, of whom 2.2 million will be taught literacy skills, 2.2 million will be able to complete primary education and 3.1 million will complete secondary education. Mexico has been strengthening the monitoring and evaluation system of this campaign with UNESCO support.

15. In the Dominican Republic, UNESCO supported the national literacy plan, "Quisqueya learns with you", which aims to teach literacy skills to more than 700,000 Dominicans. The programme has not only improved learners' proficiency in basic literacy and numeracy skills but has, in many cases, empowered them to start new businesses.

16. In Haiti, the Government is implementing a national literacy campaign directed at 300,000 Haitians by the end of 2016. With the support of UNESCO, the Government is developing a functional post-literacy curriculum and is about to launch a diagnostic study on the information system for the management of literacy, non-formal and adult education. This will be followed by a census of the population with literacy challenges in the country during the second half of 2016.

17. In Peru, the Ministry of Education conducted literacy initiatives for people who had not completed primary education. In 2014, a law was approved to establish reforms in education, as well as provisions for payment of those who deal with individuals aged 15 years or over with literacy challenges who did not complete primary education. In 2015, under the same law, standards and guidelines for the development of literacy and continuing education programmes were adopted, specifying the concept of literacy and continuing education for people over 15 years of age. In 2016, literacy and continuing education will be addressed in a joint approach by focusing efforts on specific districts of the country and implementing regional literacy projects in coordination with regional governments.

18. UNESCO has been working with a number of Arab countries to advance the literacy agenda. It has facilitated policy reviews in Egypt and the Sudan and supported the development of national literacy strategies in Iraq, Lebanon and Mauritania. It is also supporting the institutional development of the Regional Centre for Adult Education in Egypt, a category 2 centre under the auspices of UNESCO, and the training of trainers for the National Council for Literacy and Adult Education in the Sudan.

19. Almost 1 million people with insufficient literacy skills, the majority of whom are women and girls, were enrolled in Iraq's national literacy campaign. UNESCO piloted more than 135 community learning centres directed at vulnerable communities. Those centres have become a field-level resource for other development partners aiming to provide vulnerable individuals with various forms of relief and development aid. They have also served as a model for the more than 5,500 literacy centres instituted through the National Literacy Campaign. A network of more than 250 Iraqi civil society organizations was formed as the basis for the large-scale UNESCO capacity-building programme.

20. UNESCO is currently supporting the development of frameworks and resource materials for the recognition of non-formal learning in five Arab States. In order to reach unreached and underserved population groups, including refugees, UNESCO is promoting accelerated learning programmes and multi-grade teaching for the reintegration of out-of-school children into the formal system in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic and community-based programmes in Egypt and Morocco.

B. Scaling up literacy actions for girls and women

21. UNESCO supported a number of countries in addressing the literacy learning needs of girls and women. It advocated for literacy, built strategic partnerships, facilitated resource mobilization and implemented targeted literacy programmes for girls and women. At the global level, UNESCO supported the campaign of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the fourth World Conference on Women, jointly organized advocacy events and contributed to the gender-related aspects of the 2015 Education for All reviews. At the country level, gender mainstreaming in literacy has also been a clear priority, with particular attention paid to girls and women. UNESCO technical support at both the policy and programme levels have been extended in some countries, including Ethiopia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal and the United Republic of Tanzania, under its Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education, known as "Better Life, Better Future".

22. In Senegal, the Literacy Project for Young Girls and Women is aimed at promoting girls' and women's empowerment and reducing poverty through literacy and the use of ICT. Altogether, 6,500 girls and women improved their literacy levels through 253 traditional literacy classes, while 3,000 girls and women participated in a mobile and computer-based training programme. Through an integrated approach, combining literacy with skills development, an additional 3,000 women developed their skills in sewing, hairdressing, farming and other vocations. The Project successfully piloted a remedial tutoring programme that enabled 1,900 girls with learning difficulties to complete primary school. Moreover, 60 lessons in the Wolof language were broadcast on national television and in 135 classrooms, and seven regional teacher training institutes were equipped with digital interactive resource kits called "Sankoré".

23. The United Republic of Tanzania is planning to address, through its "Empowering through Education" programme, the educational needs of adolescent girls and young women who drop out of school, usually because of cultural norms and practices, such as early marriage and teenage pregnancy, and non-conducive learning environments, ranging from gender-insensitive pedagogies to inadequate toilet and water supply facilities. This project builds on an earlier one that supported alternative learning opportunities for adolescent girls and young mothers who had dropped out of school and aimed to empower them by providing income-generating pre-vocational skills. The graduates established 10 income-generating groups and registered at the district level to qualify for loans for business creation. An open and distance learning centre has been established in which the use of self-learning modules has helped to increase a sense of confidence in the teenage mothers.

24. UNESCO has been supporting the establishment by implementing partners of adult literacy centres and community learning centres in Pakistan by addressing the learning needs of out-of-school girls and women. After five or six months of teaching, learners — including those with disabilities — were able to read, write and do simple calculations. Rural communities were actively involved in literacy centres and learners were keen to acquire income-generating skills. Advocacy sessions were conducted in the community learning centres for the learners on the themes of child and maternal health, agriculture and livestock as well as gender equality. The ultimate aim was to empower the rural women and girls.

25. Reintegrating young girls and adolescents, especially from indigenous groups, into the education system through innovative approaches and technologies has been an important focus of the UNESCO contribution in scaling up literacy actions in Latin America. For example, in Guatemala, more than 300 students, particularly indigenous girls, have re-entered educational activities, benefiting from the programme of adult education, which offers flexible learning conditions. An increase of 25 per cent in the coverage of the programme was reported by the Ministry of Education in 2015.

C. Reinforcing innovative modes of literacy delivery through information and communications technology and other means

26. In rapidly changing societies, economies and environments, innovation is essential for ensuring that everyone can benefit from meaningful learning opportunities to continue to acquire, use and advance literacy skills. Quests for innovation include efforts to harness the potential of ICT for the expanded provision of quality learning opportunities, while ICT skills are increasingly perceived as part of literacy.

27. The UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy and the King Sejong Literacy Prize continue to be effective instruments for promoting and rewarding innovative practices. In 2015, five outstanding programmes from Chile, Madagascar, Mozambique, Slovakia and Sri Lanka were awarded the prizes.

28. UNESCO is also promoting innovation in the use of ICT for literacy as part of its annual Mobile Learning Week conference, which provides a global platform from which to advance understanding of the potential of mobile technology and its effective application for promoting education, including literacy and literate environments. For instance, the 2016 Mobile Learning Week focused on innovation for quality and pointed to a number of ways to harness technologies to enhance access to literacy programmes.[4]

29. UNESCO initiated projects for improved literacy teaching and learning with the support of Microsoft and Pearson Publishing. The partnership with Microsoft focuses on the design and implementation of solutions that harness the potential of emerging technologies, such as mobile and cloud technologies, to address existing limitations of time and place and expand access to quality literacy learning opportunities. The project covers four countries, Bangladesh, Egypt, Ethiopia and Mexico. The partnership with Pearson is aimed at harnessing innovative ICT resources and solutions for improving literacy in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. The initiative will carry out investigations, share information about innovative cases and develop guidelines and scenarios to inform the work of governments, the private sector and non-profit organizations.

30. Furthermore, UNESCO has fostered the innovative use of technologies to provide quality literacy learning opportunities in local languages. For example, it encouraged the use of interactive whiteboards and local language modules in teacher training and literacy classes in Cabo Verde, the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau. UNESCO implemented a pilot project in Pakistan to develop a mobile-based post-literacy programme in which newly literate learners receive post-literacy materials

[4] See www.unesco.org/new/en/mlw.

as messages on a mobile phone and read and respond to them. The learners receive text messages three times a day, read them, practise in their workbooks and report back to literacy centres. About 800 messages have been developed on 17 different topics, including religion, health, general knowledge and history. A different approach was adopted in Thailand's Karaoke Literacy Programme, in which a simple music device and projector were used to promote literacy among young people and adults belonging to ethnic minorities.

31. UNESCO has supported initiatives that enable out-of-school children and youth to gain access to high-quality learning resources. One such programme is the Mobile Literacy for Out-of-School Children project in Thailand, implemented by the Ministry of Education in partnership with Microsoft and True Corporation, that aims to enhance the basic literacy and numeracy skills of 4,000 learners and train 100 teachers. To that end, 400 tablets loaded with an application containing learning materials in three languages, Thai, Burmese and Karen, have been distributed to 20 migrant learning centres and community learning centres along the Thailand-Myanmar border, covering at least 1,440 learners (with 4 learners sharing one tablet) as well as 40 teachers. All migrant learning centres and community learning centres are furnished with Internet and satellite television equipment, including educational channels. Another programme addressing similar needs involves the development of Arabic literacy software for out-of-school children in the Sudan.

32. UNESCO believes that open and distance learning and digital learning resources can create new frontiers of learning, especially for women in difficult circumstances. In this perspective, UNESCO is joining the United Nations country team in Thailand to collaborate with institutions such as Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University to develop an online skill development course for Muslim widows in southern Thailand. UNESCO also supported Guatemala in the development of an e-literacy tool, Saqarib'al, in the Spanish, Maya-Mam and Maya-Kiche languages, enhancing access for young men and women to the means of acquiring reading and writing skills.

D. Expanding the knowledge base and monitoring and evaluation

33. UNESCO has been expanding the knowledge base on literacy through research, publications, newsletters, databases, the UNESCO Chairs programmes and prizes and other means. For example, the Effective Literacy and Numeracy Practices Database (LitBase) was used by more than 320,000 persons during 2015, including more than 800 researchers, and continues to provide 200 case studies of successful and promising approaches to literacy teaching and learning for youth and adults.

34. UNESCO has also published compilations on selected themes relevant to practitioners and policymakers. For example, recent studies have focused on intergenerational approaches to literacy, literacy for sustainable development, gender equality and use of ICT.

35. Two other publications that map global trends and look at possible future directions are a research paper entitled "The evolution and impact of literacy campaigns and programmes, 2000-2014",[5] which outlines global trends in the development and implementation of adult literacy campaigns and programmes since

[5] Available from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002341/234154e.pdf.

2000, and a special issue of the *International Review of Education — Journal of Lifelong Learning* on lifelong literacy that sought to unpack the literacy target of Sustainable Development Goal 4 from a lifelong-learning perspective.

36. UNESCO has designed and implemented several research projects in collaboration with a number of partners including the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development, to respond to knowledge gaps for the advancement of literacy in the lifelong-learning perspective. This research provides key findings on a range of issues, including: (a) developing a literate environment; (b) addressing the learning needs of out-of-school children; (c) understanding ways of enhancing knowledge and skills for agriculture and improving rural livelihoods; (d) creating strategies to expand mobile reading; (e) recognition, validation and accreditation of prior and acquired basic knowledge and skills; (f) literacy and gender, especially relating to girls and women; and (g) literacy learning in multilingual contexts. The first UNESCO Chair on adult literacy and learning for social transformation, established at the University of East Anglia (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) in 2016, is another means of advancing innovative research and capacity development, connecting universities and research institutes in developed and developing countries.

37. UNESCO is supporting countries in following up on important recommendations for literacy action in the Belém Framework for Action, adopted at the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education, held in 2009. UNESCO launched the Observatory for Adult Education in Latin America and the Caribbean to generate knowledge and collaborative studies and to serve as a platform for dialogue among governments and local, national, regional and international institutions. It also worked with eight countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region to develop criteria for a quality curriculum for the education of young people and adults in the region.

38. In respect of monitoring literacy progress and measuring literacy and numeracy skills, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics has continued to be the major source of literacy data, providing annual updates of literacy statistics, while the Education for All Global Monitoring Reports (2013/14 and 2015) offered an assessment of the world's progress towards the six Education for All goals. National Education for All reviews for 2000-2015 conducted in nearly 130 countries offered another opportunity to take stock. The third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education is to be launched on International Literacy Day 2016 (8 September).

39. The youth and adult literacy rates for the population aged 15-24 years and 15 years and older, respectively, and the number of illiterate adults and young people are long-established indicators for the measurement of literacy. National data on literacy are typically collected with household surveys or population censuses, relying mostly on the definition of literacy as "the ability to read and write, with understanding, a short, simple statement about one's everyday life", which divides the population into two groups — literate and illiterate.[6] Recognizing the limitations of these literacy measures, and in response to General Assembly resolution 69/141, efforts for the further development and sophistication of statistical literacy

[6] *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses: Revision 2* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.07.XVII.8). Available from http://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/seriesm/seriesm_67rev2e.pdf.

information have been based on an understanding of literacy as a continuum of proficiency levels, rather than a binary classification, within and beyond the context of monitoring of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The monitoring framework reflects this shift, setting the indicator for target 4.6 as the percentage of the population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional literacy and numeracy skills, for which an enhancement of the direct measurement of literacy skills is required.

40. Conventional literacy statistics are also being elaborated. In addition to the youth and adult literacy rates, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics has recently begun to publish an elderly literacy rate for persons aged 65 years and older. As at June 2016, UNESCO had data on literacy rates in the population aged 25-64 years. In combination with the youth and elderly literacy rate, this indicator will allow a comparison of basic reading and writing skills in three distinct, non-overlapping age groups. To respond to the focus on equity in the Sustainable Development Goals and the call for more disaggregated data in General Assembly resolution 69/141, UNESCO also plans to disseminate literacy rates for urban and rural areas separately, in addition to literacy rates for women, men and both sexes combined.

41. Against this backdrop, UNESCO is proposing to consult Member States on the development of appropriate literacy assessment strategies that enable more accurate monitoring of improvement in literacy proficiency levels in a population.

42. For most developed countries, information on the literacy and numeracy of adults is available from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies for 25 countries, created by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and its predecessors, the International Adult Literacy Survey and the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey. Additional information is available from the Skills Toward Employment and Productivity programme of the World Bank; this incorporates items from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies and was implemented in 13 countries in 2010.

43. Most middle-income and least developed countries do not participate in large-scale assessment programmes with cross-country comparability. Estimates of youth and adult literacy in those countries often rely on a self-assessment of literacy skills in national population censuses, sample surveys or other measures, such as data on educational attainment. More countries, however, are conducting national adult literacy assessments using larger household surveys and literacy-specific surveys.[7] UNESCO is currently responding to requests from three Member States — the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kenya and Saint Lucia — for support in conducting national literacy surveys. There are at least two major challenges. The first is to reconcile the need for a country-driven, contextually relevant assessment process and an internationally comparable data set. The second challenge lies in defining skills and proficiency levels so that they are relevant for all countries across the globe, given the universal nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

44. It is encouraging to recognize increasing efforts to conduct literacy assessments and the potential of national adult literacy and citizen-led assessments for improving the effectiveness of policies as well as teaching and learning for literacy. There are several challenges, however, in monitoring the achievement of

[7] *Education for All 2000-2015: achievements and challenges*.

Sustainable Development Goal targets related to proficiency in literacy and numeracy, including:

(a) Development of a consensus on the definitions of literacy and numeracy;

(b) Development of measures and appropriate reporting categories that have cross-cultural and cross-language validity;

(c) Design and implementation of a cost-effective operational model that would allow the use of valid and reliable assessments for monitoring progress and achieving measurable targets;

(d) Ensuring adequate institutional and individual capacities for data management and measurement of literacy skills.

45. To address these challenges and monitor Sustainable Development Goal target 4.6, UNESCO is collaborating with OECD to develop an international assessment framework for measuring the literacy levels of the population and a set of tools to link the new assessment with existing cross-national assessments and instruments to assess the skills of the population.

46. At the country level, efforts were made to enhance national information systems for managing non-formal education or integrated education management information systems in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Chad, Mauritania, Nepal and Rwanda. In Iraq, work was done on the development of a literacy data collection system to be streamlined with the larger education management information system. In Nigeria, non-formal education data were streamlined and discrepancies resolved, and three nationally accepted data collection instruments for state and local government and for centres were developed.

47. UNESCO is supporting Member States in the development of cost-effective tools for programme evaluation, primarily through the programme Action Research: Measuring Literacy Programme Participants' Learning Outcomes. The programme responds to the need of policymakers to measure learning outcomes through a common reference framework. It seeks to capture the proficiency levels and the actual performance of learners completing courses from different literacy programmes. The aim is to provide policymakers and development partners with reliable and contextualized data, which will be used to improve the quality of literacy programmes for youth and adults, strengthen evidence-based advocacy and develop national capacities with an emphasis on ownership and sustainability. The tools developed in the first phase of the programme have been used by the five participating countries, Burkina Faso, Mali, Morocco, the Niger and Senegal, to improve the existing programmes. Seven more countries, Benin, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Togo, have shown interest in the programme and have joined the second phase.

E. Advocating for literacy on the global agenda and ensuring synergies between different actions through multi-stakeholder partnerships and networks and other means

48. UNESCO, in partnership with other co-conveners[8] of the 2015 World Education Forum, ensured that literacy forms an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, encapsulated in Sustainable Development Goal 4 on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

49. UNESCO played catalytic and coordination roles in drafting a new normative instrument, the Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education, which was adopted at the thirty-eighth session of the General Conference of UNESCO in November 2015. Replacing the 1976 Recommendation on the Development of Adult Education to reflect current educational, cultural, political, social and economic challenges, the new Recommendation provides a more detailed definition of adult learning and education, within which basic literacy skills are one of the three core areas, along with continuing training and professional development and promotion of active citizenship.

50. Another example of the UNESCO coordination role is the annual celebration of International Literacy Day across the world. In 2014 and 2015, the Day focused on literacy and sustainable development. Events organized in a number of countries, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Chile, Cuba, Ethiopia, France, Ghana, Mozambique, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, the Sudan, Swaziland and Thailand, contributed to raising the profile of literacy.

51. In 2016, International Literacy Day marks its fiftieth anniversary. On 26 October 1966, the General Conference of UNESCO, at its fourteenth session, proclaimed 8 September as International Literacy Day to remind the international community of the importance of literacy for individuals, communities and societies and the need for intensified efforts towards more literate societies.

52. In 2014, a major global celebration took place in Bangladesh, when the Government, in partnership with UNESCO, organized the International Conference on Girls' and Women's Literacy and Education in support of the United Nations Secretary-General's Global Education First Initiative. The Dhaka Declaration, adopted during the International Conference, served as a reminder for the global community of the importance of literacy as a driver for sustainable development, focusing on girls and women.

53. In 2015, UNESCO organized a global meeting in Paris, shedding light on the connection between literacy and different areas of sustainable development. The Paris Communiqué on Literacy and Sustainable Societies, adopted at the meeting, not only advanced the 2030 vision of literacy and supported the creation of the Global Alliance for Literacy within the framework of lifelong learning, but also highlighted key areas of future action to ensure sustained collective efforts towards a more literate world.

[8] The other co-conveners are the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, UN-Women and the World Bank. The International Labour Organization recently joined the co-conveners' group.

54. The UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities is yet another platform that creates opportunities to reinforce literacy action at local levels. As more cities join the Network, UNESCO will work with Member States and local governments to enhance literacy-learning opportunities as a key step towards building learning cities.

55. At the global level, UNESCO played its coordination and catalytic role in scaling up literacy efforts in the period following the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012). As a follow-up to the final evaluation of the Decade, presented at the sixty-eighth session of the General Assembly, in 2013, the UNESCO report (A/69/183) was submitted to the Assembly at its sixty-ninth session, proposing the five strategic axes of action for the post-Decade era. This led to the adoption of resolution 69/141, sponsored by 81 countries, which sent a strong signal to the global community regarding Member States' renewed commitment to literacy, the need for intensified collective efforts through an effective multi-stakeholder partnership and the role of UNESCO. The need for UNESCO to play coordination and catalytic roles and the idea of an effective multi-stakeholder partnership were also endorsed by the UNESCO General Conference at its thirty-seventh session, in 2013.

56. In response to the call by the United Nations and the General Conference, the UNESCO Secretariat has been engaged in a series of consultations with key stakeholders over the past two years. The proposal for an effective multi-stakeholder partnership was broadly accepted by participants of the two major events held on the occasion of the celebrations of International Literacy Day in 2014 and 2015, in Bangladesh and Paris, respectively.

57. UNESCO has decided to establish the Global Alliance for Literacy within the framework of lifelong learning as a thematic partnership that will help Member States make faster progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, since literacy plays a direct and indirect role in many of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Alliance, composed of a group of willing and committed partners (countries, regional entities, donors, the private sector, civil society organizations, foundations, associations, experts and others), will work to improve literacy for sustainable development.

58. The Alliance will stimulate and promote collaborative programmes that connect literacy with the sustainable development agenda within a lifelong and life-wide approach.

F. Recommendations on future action on literacy for life

59. **On the basis of the present report on literacy for life, the following recommendations may be considered by the General Assembly:**

(a) **Recognize literacy as a part of the right to education, as it brings distinct benefits of a human, political, social, economic and cultural nature for individuals and societies, and as a development accelerator contributing to the realization of an equitable, inclusive and sustainable world;**

(b) **Call upon Governments to scale up literacy programmes for children, youth and adults, with particular attention given to disadvantaged and marginalized groups, including girls, women, indigenous peoples, persons**

with disabilities and children and youth and adults in humanitarian emergencies, to foster the innovative delivery of literacy services, through technology and a strengthened institutional network and other means, to promote an intersectoral approach by linking literacy learning with sectors such as health, social welfare, labour, industry and agriculture, to address diverse learning needs through relevant learning materials in different languages, to establish multi-stakeholder partnerships with the active participation of civil society and the private sector, and to monitor progress by collecting, analysing and using data to enhance programme and policy effectiveness;

(c) Encourage United Nations organizations, multilateral and bilateral donors, regional organizations, civil society, academia and the private sector to continue their collective efforts for the promotion of literacy and literate environments and to contribute to shaping the Global Alliance for Literacy within the framework of lifelong learning into an effective platform for synergistic action at global, regional, national and community levels;

(d) Call upon UNESCO to continue to play a coordinating and catalytic role by implementing the recommendations of the Alliance and to continue to support Member States, in collaboration with partners, in enhancing capacities for policy formulation, programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation as well as sharing information and knowledge on policies, programmes and progress in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal targets connected with literacy, especially target 4.6 on youth and adult literacy, and creating synergies of action between the Alliance and other initiatives, including the Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education and the Global Network of Learning Cities.

III. Education for democracy

60. The developments described below relate to the implementation of resolution 69/268 on education for democracy. The links between human rights, democracy and development are well established and have been made even more explicit in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Education for democracy assumes particular importance if the purpose of education itself is taken to be to nurture responsible and active citizens capable of contributing effectively to the advancement, peace and prosperity of their societies.

61. While the concept of education for democracy is generally understood as creating active, law-abiding, conscious citizens, a survey of the literature, policies, programmes and curricular materials related to education for democracy reveals that its practical application faces several difficulties: (a) there is no single, universally agreed-upon definition of democracy, nor are its current manifestations necessarily accepted as an ideal; (b) it is wide-ranging and includes or overlaps with many other programmes, such as human rights education, global citizenship education, education for sustainable development, peace education, civic education and the like; (c) the close connection between democracy, good governance, leadership, human rights, national identity, freedom of expression, peace, security, inclusiveness, minority rights, culture and religion makes the topic extremely sensitive in all societies because it examines power relationships and challenges the

status quo and established interests; and (d) there is growing disillusionment with, and lack of trust in, the institutions that are to be upheld by education for democracy.

62. These challenges call for a shift in educational practices to prepare learners, both in and out of school, both youth and adults, for a lifelong process of social innovation to shape new forms of social organization. Education for democracy must therefore be embedded in social action and its practices should emerge from a continuous process of action and reflection.

63. However, some elements of programmes and curricula can be identified from current practice. They revolve around the development of core capabilities thought to be important for participating effectively in a democracy and bringing about social change. These include cognitive capacities related to generating, analysing and using knowledge, expressing thoughts with clarity, understanding principles and applying them; moral capacities related to personal integrity, commitment to justice or fairness, trustworthiness, perseverance and the like; capacities relating to cooperation, collective action and decision-making, collective leadership, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, inclusiveness, appreciation of cultural diversity; and capacities related to objective, humble and systematic learning from action in the context of service to the community.

64. Those capacities can be acquired only in action and in a conducive environment. Thus, in formal education, attention must be paid to role modelling by teachers and by the school system. In non-formal settings, opportunities must be provided in the form of community-based processes or projects for learning the attitudes and skills of democracy.

65. The range and number of formal and informal activities that can be classified as education for democracy are vast. Included here are a few illustrations of the kinds of action taken by United Nations agencies globally to promote education for democracy in schools and in the community at large, as well as initiatives of Member States.

66. UNESCO promotes global citizenship education through global and regional advocacy initiatives, as well as the provision of policy guidance and curriculum development. It also supports media and information literacy to prepare citizens to participate in political, democratic and social life inside and outside the formal education system, as well as countering intolerance. Finally, it promotes the development of knowledge and practices that foster respect for human rights, philosophy and intercultural dialogue, with particular emphasis on fighting racism, discrimination, extremism, radicalization and the manipulation of cultural and religious identities in order to achieve a culture of peace and democracy. The UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network operates as a key mechanism for embedding democratic principles in the classroom, school governance, student participation and leadership and project management.

67. The United Nations Democracy Fund supports projects to develop action plans for democracy and human rights education and reduce educational inequalities and exclusion, empowering youth, particularly women, to analyse information, develop leadership skills and participate in decision-making processes in a safe environment. Human rights and democracy education for illiterate rural women and young people, as well as ICT, are tools for promoting active citizenship.

68. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is promoting and coordinating the ongoing World Programme for Human Rights Education, assisting Member States in national implementation and developing and disseminating human rights training and educational materials and methodologies based on good practices.

69. Education for democracy is embedded in the support provided by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for local governance, decentralization, resilience, national dialogue and elections as well as in UNICEF local governance action addressing women's participation and child-related issues within a large number of initiatives worldwide.

70. Examples of initiatives taken by Member States as well as specific supportive initiatives of United Nations agencies are grouped below by region.

71. In the Arab States, education for democracy has operated largely out of the formal school system, focusing on channelling the energies of youth towards constructive aims, bringing women more prominently into public life, helping communities mobilize around local governance issues, stimulating access to information and a constructive role for the mass media and fostering national dialogues on key societal issues. In response to the Syrian crisis, in particular, UNDP has sought to strengthen the capacity of individuals, communities and institutions to respond creatively to emergencies, reinforcing habits of tolerance, collaboration and peacebuilding and opening new pathways for local democratic governance, dialogue, collaboration, service, openness, participation and spaces for sharing and discussion.

72. Most of the activities in the Asia-Pacific region focus on global citizenship education, peace education, human rights education and dialogue on the mass media and freedom of information. A number of activities have targeted the training of teachers and educators and aim at empowering young people to become active contributors to building peaceful and sustainable societies, using information and communications technology. Good practices have also been established to promote learning to live together and the well-being of learners in education systems in different countries of the region.

73. In Europe and North America, issues such as inequality, loss of trust in institutions, nationalism and xenophobia are at the core of education for democracy. These challenges require considerable changes at individual and societal levels. Efforts in this region therefore focus on raising awareness of global interdependence and sustainable development and empowering individuals to make more responsible daily choices and engage in the required changes.

74. The Latin American and Caribbean region is where the most progress is being made in terms of the systematic and innovative incorporation of education for democracy into school curricula, national policies and the development of curricula on human rights education, learning to live together, ethics, aesthetics and citizenship, as well as the establishment of reference centres on human rights education and the development of materials. The Caribbean countries are less active than the Latin American countries in this area, notwithstanding valuable initiatives at the regional and subregional levels.

75. In sub-Saharan Africa, education for democracy programmes focus on the development of related approaches, such as education for a culture of peace, global

citizenship education and education for sustainable development, which promote values of peace, human rights, democracy, respect for religious and cultural diversity and justice, and are increasingly reflected in national curricula.

76. In view of the foregoing, it should be noted that education for democracy has already been implemented in national education systems (formal and non-formal) in all regions of the world under different headings and through different topics, including education on democratic and governance processes, citizenship, civics education, human rights and fundamental freedoms, peace, intercultural dialogue and the like. Following the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, which explicitly include governance issues and call for socioeconomic transformation of individuals and societies, efforts should be made to promote, implement and integrate education for democracy in a more coherent way.